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## Browning High School's Innovative Career Prep Program

by Rob Marvin

According to Matthew Johnson, when he started working at Browning High School ten years ago, only 5 to 10 students attended college after graduation each year. Last year, the number was close to 50. Johnson, the senior counselor at BHS, cites the school's senior portfolio program as the key to this remarkable improvement.

Initiated eight years ago, the program requires all seniors to submit a portfolio documenting their academic performance, their community service, and their college and career preparation materials, including a resume, job application, letters of reference, and a scholarship essay.

The concept behind the program is simple: you can tell students how to prepare for life after high school until you're blue in the face, but if you actually want them to do it, you've got to make it a graduation requirement. Since the program started, college application and retention has increased dramatically, community service has increased, more students are applying for scholarships, and the number of scholarships obtained by BHS students is at an all-time high.

The requirements of the program are rigorous. Students must submit their transcripts and attendance report, results from two standardized tests, two letters of reference, a resume and job application, a two-page life goal essay/scholarship letter, 20 hours of documented community service with a written explanation of this service, and samples of course work in writing, math, science, and the social sciences, as well as electives. Extra points are awarded for submitting college and financial aid applications, for involvement in clubs and activities, and for any awards students may have won.

The portfolio is not merely submitted for grading, but must be presented orally to a panel of community leaders. This presentation takes the form

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# What is the MCIS Administrative Tool?

*by Dee Burnham*

If there were a tool to help you organize, track and manage your students' career needs, would you use it? The Montana Career Information System offers, as part of its computer program, an Administrative Tool that does exactly that. It can be used for career development, career choice, skills assessment, and financial aid needs, helping students to make more informed choices.

Students are asked to create portfolios using their interests, strengths, and work preferences to help them identify occupations they may want to investigate. They are given detailed information on these occupations, including wages expected, job availability, and training necessary. They can research colleges or technical schools for attendance requirements, fees, and size, and compare their favorites to help make decisions. Students are given information on financial aid, how to apply to their chosen college and how to write a college or scholarship essay. With all this information available to students, teachers need a tool to manage it all. MCIS has given you this tool.

To use the Administrative Tool in the MCIS program, a single site administrator is assigned. This person can be anyone, from a principal, to a counselor or a teacher; however, each teacher or counselor can create an additional account to personalize the system to suit their students' data, and to best fit their particular teaching or counseling needs. The Administrative Tool offers the choice to manage portfolios, manage groups, and view reports.

To manage the portfolios your students have created, they must choose to **OPT IN** when creating their portfolios. This allows the teacher/counselor to view all portfolios, accessing them by student name to form groups that are beneficial for tracking usage of system, and information accessed (i.e. occupations, financial aid, 2 year versus 4 year, local or national colleges, military options, etc.).

After the students have created their Portfolios the Administrative Tool makes it easy to separate them into groups. The Manage Groups folder allows you to create groups, view assignments, and add or remove portfolios. Groups can be sorted by grade, graduation year (class), teacher or counselor. Groups can be edited at any time, new groups formed, assignments assessed, and students moved from one group to another.

The Portfolio Detail option in the reports section allows users to drill down within a portfolio, accessing student comments within different categories, such as letters sent to colleges for more information on financial aid or application processes, or the date the portfolio was created or added to. The Portfolio Summary option, under report views, allows users to generate and print a report of all saved information. With these options, it is possible to make any classroom an interactive/monitored learning environment beneficial to students as well as educators.

To learn more, get log in information, or ask questions, please contact us at 1-800-541-3904.

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## Montana Career Guide 2005 Now Available

Geared toward high school students (but useful to all job seekers), the Montana Career Guide 2005 provides the latest Labor Market Information for over two hundred Montana occupations. Its expansive occupations guide groups jobs by their educational requirements, describes job outlook and duties performed, and lists high-end, median, and low-end wages.

The career guide also includes information for every stage of the job search, from assessing work interests to writing a resume. The career guide contains articles on in-demand job skills, gaining work experience, higher

education and vocational training, financial aid for college, searching for a job, marketing yourself, writing cover letters and resumes, and interviewing for jobs. It also lists college entrance requirements for Montana, apprenticeship programs, Montana colleges and vocational schools, locations of job service workforce centers, and other job seeker resources.

The 2005 version of the Montana Career Guide is now available for download at [www.ourfactsyourfuture.org](http://www.ourfactsyourfuture.org). Printed copies will be shipped to all Montana high school sophomores by the end of November.

## Student Assistance Foundation (SAF) News

### MCIS is Now Available to ALL Students!

Thanks to Student Assistance Foundation (SAF), the Montana Career Resource Network can now provide the Montana Career Information System (MCIS) free to all Montanans! Historically, annual license fees paid by schools, school districts, organizations, and agencies have solely funded this program. Now, through an exclusive partnership between SAF and the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, this powerful tool is available to all Montanans, at no cost to schools, agencies, or individual users.

SAF, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing Montana students with the resources to finance and pursue postsecondary education, is providing grants to schools and organizations that choose to offer the best source of career information – MCIS – to their students and customers.

MCIS provides the O\*Net Interest Profiler, Work Importance Locator, and the Micro-Skills assessment to aid students and job seekers in their occupational exploration. If you would like to use MCIS at your school, please call 1-800-541-3904 to request a grant form. Through the grant, your school's license fee for MCIS is paid by SAF, and you have the option to add the IDEAS assessment to your MCIS system for a \$100.00 license fee, payable to the Montana Career Resource Network. The IDEAS assessment is an interest inventory that measures occupational interests.

Our goal is for every student to have the career information they need to make informed and considered career and educational choices.

### Got HOSA?

Student Assistance Foundation has just issued a challenge grant to Montana Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) to raise funds to support existing programs, and to expand programs to new schools in Montana. Student Assistance Foundation has granted \$5,000 and will donate an additional \$5,000 once matching funds of at least \$50,000 are raised from other sources. HOSA is vitally important to Montana because it provides students with real world learning opportunities and preparation for health care occupations. HOSA is a great way to address some of Montana's workforce shortages in health care.

### Foster Care Education Training Vouchers

Student Assistance Foundation recently received a grant to help students "aging out" of foster care successfully transition to postsecondary education. The program includes an outreach component for foster care students currently in high school, and \$5,000 annually to help pay tuition expenses for foster care students who go on to college. To learn more about the program, contact Rhonda Wodnik at Student Assistance Foundation, 1-800-852-2761.

### Grants & Awards Corner

#### NEA Foundation's Learning & Leadership Grants

Grants support public school teachers, public education support professionals, and/or faculty and staff in public institutions of higher education.

Grants to individuals fund participation in high-quality professional development experiences, such as summer institutes or action research.

Grants to groups fund collegial study, including study groups, action research, lesson study, or mentoring experiences for faculty or staff new to an assignment.

All professional development must improve practice, curriculum, and student achievement. "One-shot" professional growth experiences, such as attending a national conference or engaging a professional speaker, are discouraged. Decisions regarding the content of the professional growth activities must be based upon an assessment of student work undertaken with colleagues, and must be integrated into the institutional planning process. Grant funds may be used for fees, travel expenses, books, or other materials that enable applicants to learn subject matter, instructional approaches, and skills. Recipients are expected to exercise professional leadership by sharing their new learning with their colleagues.

Amount of Learning & Leadership Grants: The grant amount is \$2,000 for individuals and \$5,000 for groups engaged in collegial study.

Please visit <http://www.neafoundation.org/programs/grantguides.htm> for complete details.

## **Browning High School (continued)**

of a job interview, in which students must answer four “open-ended” questions about themselves, their goals, their values, and their skills. Students are expected to dress and behave just as they would for a job interview. This not only prepares students for the interview process, it gives them direct contact with key figures in their community, such as tribal councilmen, tribal attorneys, Blackfeet National Bank officials, representatives from Blackfeet Community College, and local business owners.

Johnson says that in the past, many of his students would get discouraged by the college application process. They didn’t know what was required, and when they found out, they didn’t know how they were going to collect all of the materials. Now, every Browning graduate has these materials at hand and ready to use. When it comes to career preparation, Browning High School’s innovative portfolio program might just be an ideal model for all Montana high schools.

The **Montana Career Information System** (MCIS) has been a valuable tool in helping Browning High School students put together their senior portfolios. According to Matthew Johnson, MCIS is used extensively in the “career profile” section of the portfolio, in which students present research on an occupation they are considering. Profiles must be as in-depth as possible, detailing education requirements, classes they should take in college, skills needed, workplace environment, and the job market, all of which they can find on MCIS. Additionally, students must take a career assessment to include in their portfolios, and most of them use occupation sort, MICRO-skills assessment, or the IDEAS assessment from MCIS. They also use MCIS for interview and resume tips, and to search for colleges and scholarships.